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> 'Metabolic City' explores visionary architecture of the 1960s

## 'Metabolic City' explores visionary architecture of the 1960s

Amidst the cultural and political ferment of the 1960s, avant-garde artists and architects began embracing biological and scientific models as well as the potentials of emerging technologies to explore radical new directions in urban design, developing projects that were at once fanciful, complex and conceptually serious.

Beginning Friday, Sept. 18, the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum will present "Metabolic City," an exhibition surveying work by the British collective Archigram; the Japanese Metabolists (whose members include Fumihiko Maki, architect of the Kemper Art Museum); and the Dutch painter Constant Nieuwenhuys, an early member of the Situationist International.

Curated and designed by Heather Woofter, assistant professor of architecture in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, "Metabolic City" will feature approximately 70 drawings, plans, models and conceptual projects, including rarely seen materials drawn from private archives and a sampling of work by influential predecessors.

Organized thematically, the exhibition explores theoretical and conceptual overlaps between these groups, all of which came to view the city as a kind of living organism, in which civil infrastructure forms the basis for social interaction and individual liberty.

At the same time, though they articulated their views in explicitly political terms, each pioneered distinctive — and remarkably prescient — means of architectural representation, often employing techniques and processes that are only now entering mainstream practice.

Networks of urban circulation were a major area of focus. Mechanical systems, roadways, pedestrian passages and other built environments frequently were conceived in relation to electronics, media and other immaterial connections. Archigram's "Computer City," for instance, tracks the infrastructures that allow its futuristic "Plug-In City" to operate. Maki's "Golgi Structures" — named for Nobel Prize-winner Camillo Golgi, who developed techniques for visualizing nerve cell bodies — alternate dense urban areas with unstructured open spaces. Encasing the latter are light-absorbing cells that facilitate communication, energy distribution and mechanical systems.

These figures also shared a belief that adaptable habitats could foster unprecedented levels of freedom and mobility. Archigram's "Walking City" consists of mammoth "pods," or cities built as ship-like vessels, capable of traversing the earth. Nieuwenhuys' "New Babylon North" suggests a sprawling serpentine structure that could be shaped and reshaped by inhabitants, their labors supported by factories hidden below ground.

"Wall City," by the Metabolist Kisho Kurokawa, envisions a series of movable plug-in units for living and working, the increased efficiency of which would shorten the workweek and encourage leisure travel.

Growth patterns and life cycles are a part of all living systems, an observation that deeply influenced Kurokawa's "Metamorphosis," which employs techniques derived from biological modeling to represent the transformation of urban spaces. Growth patterns of a



Courtesy Image

"Electronic Tomato — Collage" by Warren Chalk and David Greene of the British collective Archigram is one of the many artworks in Kemper's "Metabolic City" exhibit, on display until Jan. 4, 2010.

media-based variety inform Archigram's utopian "Instant City," in which large airships descend onto population centers to install infrastructure supporting community events ranging from circuses to political rallies. As the airships move on to other locations, those infrastructural networks remain behind.

Underlying many projects was a hopeful yet critical view of new engineering technologies. Though this generation of artists and architects witnessed the effects of World War II and the mass destruction made possible by technological inventions, the emerging space age nevertheless sparked a sense of optimism and potential.

For his "Marine City," the Metabolist Kiyonori Kikutake collaborated with marine engineers to detail entire metropolises constructed out at sea. Composed of multiple towers connected in a ring, these structures would submerge beneath the waves during inclement weather and return safely to the surface as waters grew calm.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Dennis Crompton, a former member of Archigram, will host a gallery talk at 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 19, in the Kemper Art Museum. Crompton spent last fall teaching in the Sam Fox School as the Ruth and Norman Moore Visiting Professor of Architecture.

"Metabolic City" will open with a reception from at 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 18, and remain on view through Jan. 4, 2010.

Both the reception and exhibition are free and open to the public. For more information, visit [kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu](http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu) or call 935-4523.